

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



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*Opportunity  
and  
Responsibility*

*by CLIFTON WALLER BARRETT*

Bulletin of Sweet Briar College, February 1965

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BULLETIN OF SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE. PUBLISHED BY THE COLLEGE  
IN FEBRUARY, APRIL, JULY, SEPTEMBER, NOVEMBER (2).  
VOLUME 48, NUMBER 1, FEBRUARY 1965  
Second-class postage paid at Sweet Briar, Virginia

# *Opportunity and Responsibility*

*by*

CLIFTON WALLER BARRETT

FOUNDERS' DAY ADDRESS

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE

OCTOBER 14, 1964

## *Founders' Day*

OCTOBER 14, 1964 — 10:00 A.M.

## THE MARY REYNOLDS BABCOCK AUDITORIUM

## PROCESSIONAL

## OPENING HYMN — *Ancient of Days*

INVOCATION The Reverend Frank M. McClain  
Chaplain, Sweet Briar College

CANTEMUS OMNES DOMINO, from "Jeptha" *Giacomo Carissimi*

## Sweet Briar College Choir

ADDRESS: Mr. C. Waller Barrett

## “Opportunity and Responsibility”

## SWEET BRIAR SONG

## BENEDICTION

Mr. McClain

## RECESSSIONAL

Immediately after the exercises in the Auditorium, members of the Community will participate in a Memorial Service at Monument Hill honoring the Founders of Sweet Briar College.



Mr. Barrett is greeted by a senior, Alice McEldowney

## *Introduction*

THE BEST introduction to our speaker today, Mr. Clifton Waller Barrett, would be for each of you to pay a visit to the Barrett Library at the University of Virginia. There you will find the most valuable collection of books and manuscripts on American Literature in existence. This vast collection is the result of Mr. Barrett's labors over the past twenty-five years, the main bulk of which he presented to his alma mater in 1960. In it are upwards of 300,000 items ranging from Revolutionary poems and plays to a first edition of J. D. Salinger's *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*, published in 1963. In between are such remarkable rarities as the earliest surviving manuscripts of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, a complete set of Poe's first editions, the authors' manuscripts of such outstanding works as Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie*, and to me the most interesting of all, Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker's History of New York*.

Therefore, I hope the next time you are in Charlottesville, you will take the time away from your more usual pursuits on the University campus to enjoy and marvel at this amazing collection.

One marvels all the more when one realizes that book collecting for Mr. Barrett is a second

career — one which he embarked upon seriously only after a successful career as a shipping executive. It is reported that he haunted second-hand bookstores in downtown New York during his lunch hours away from the offices of the North Atlantic-Gulf Steamship Company, the company which he founded shortly after he graduated from the University of Virginia and from which he retired as president in 1954. Once Mr. Barrett decided what his second career would be, he applied to it the same stubborn persistence, the same intense devotion to detail, the same shrewd and often daring initiative which had made him a shipping tycoon.

Today Mr. Barrett is president of the learned Bibliographical Society of America, chairman of the Council of Fellows of the Pierpont Morgan Library, President of the Grolier Club and a trustee or associate of a dozen other leading institutions. He is one of the six members of the committee appointed by the late President Kennedy to select books for the White House Library. In March of this year the General Assembly of Virginia passed a resolution saluting Clifton Waller Barrett for his "contribution to the advancement of scholarship in this Commonwealth." A man of great versatility — businessman, bibliophile, author and book collector — Mr. Barrett's motto could well be this terse poetic line from Emily Dickinson:

There is no frigate like a book  
To take us miles away.

ANNE GARY PANNELL



# *Opportunity and Responsibility*

THE LATE John Fitzgerald Kennedy in his inaugural address in 1961 uttered words that seem destined to be remembered for many presidencies to come. In ringing tones, he declaimed, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." This pronouncement seemed to find fertile ground in the idealistic elements which have ever been a part of the American imagination and which, despite the disparagement of cynics, are, I believe, more and more pervasive in the minds of our younger citizens.

However, if you relate Mr. Kennedy's precept to the attitude of present day college students, both those seeking entrance and those already on campus, I think you will find the application reversed. To bring it down to a more per-

sonal basis, I am sure that you are all too well-bred to say it, so I shall say it for you. You have asked from the beginning and are asking now, "What can Sweet Briar do for me?" And if certain people raise their eyebrows in depreciation I shall say with emphasis that it is an entirely proper question. While you were preparing yourselves in secondary schools and during the anxious period of College Boards and personal interviews it was quite legitimate for you to direct your aim toward the college that you felt offered you, individually, the best opportunity for higher education and personal fulfillment. Now that you are actually here and are substituting experience for theory there is certainly no reason why you should not keep your critical faculties alive to the essential values of your college, its curriculum, faculty, administration and general atmosphere. Only by doing so can you be fully appreciative of your opportunities and derive the greatest benefit from them.

Perhaps by glancing at the history of Sweet Briar we can shed a little light on this absorbing question. Since today is Founders' Day, it is appropriate to go back to those responsible for drafting the original plans for this institution and establishing its purposes and objectives. First things came first to the founding trustees and the determination of a religious philosophy was the first order of the day. It is revealing of their temperament that, despite the preponderance of Episcopalian clergymen among them, they reached a decision, a wise one, that the college was not to be placed under the control of any denomination. This did not mean that the school was not to have a firm religious base. By no means was it to be secular or non-religious. On the contrary, the trustees had an abiding faith that "the free and untrammelled search for Truth would lead to God who created in His children a desire to know." Thus there was established a religious foundation which through the years

has added the indispensable ingredients of faith and spiritual inspiration to the atmosphere of Sweet Briar.

After this paramount issue had been settled there came up the matter of the most desirable kind of school to establish. Would it be a preparatory school? A finishing school? A junior college? The answer was no — on all points. The trustees determined to found "a liberal arts college of the highest rank," combining the characteristics of "Western and Southern schools which aim to equip women for the practical vocations of life" and Northern schools which are "intellectual." There would be courses "of proper adaptation to the needs and conditions of the female mind — some literary and some scientific — and, along with them, thoroughly practical training in certain artistic and industrial branches of knowledge . . ." How wise they were in this determination and how well their hopes and plans have been realized is a matter of record. Under successive capable administrations, notably those of Miss Meta Glass and of Mrs. Anne Pannell, the college has grown and matured into an institution that bears comparison with the best in the nation. It should be emphasized that it has not become a provincial college. It has reached out to every state and to foreign countries for its students. There has been a constant enrichment in its intellectual resources and a progressive expansion in the courses offered as well as an improvement in their quality. Faculty members of academic distinction and proven teaching ability have been attracted.

Today one can see the outlines of the new Sweet Briar. With the chapel as the apex, the campus will flow out naturally with the dormitories on the left and the library and academic buildings on the right culminating in lovely Sweet

Briar House. As we continue we come to the Fine Arts building, certainly one of the handsomest and best-equipped structures of its kind in any college. Almost directly opposite will be the Science Building, now under construction. You have heard of the celebrated author and scientist, Sir Charles P. Snow. He has written about "The Two Cultures," scientific and humanistic, and their incompatability. In these two buildings you have these two cultures in harmonious propinquity carrying out the intention of the founding trustees to combine in education the practical with the intellectual and the artistic. Only a few weeks ago there was announced the wonderful news of the grant from the Charles A. Dana Foundation. As you know, this is a challenge grant of \$300,000 requiring the raising of matching funds in cash by the end of 1965. Of the total amount, \$400,000 is to be used to build the Charles A. Dana wing on the Mary Helen Cochran Library. As Mrs. Pannell has told you, I am particularly interested in libraries. I subscribe whole-heartedly to Thomas Jefferson's belief that the library is the heart of the college and I salute a president of the University of California who said, "Give me a library and I will build you a university." I should like to say to your President and her associates, "If you will accept my services, I wish to enlist in the effort to bring to fruition this library project."

With this record of excellence and this program of development and improvement in mind, I think your unspoken question as to what Sweet Briar can do for you has been answered. It can give you the opportunity of acquiring the finest kind of higher education, the opportunity of true intellectual development and of moral and spiritual growth. This is indeed a great opportunity. I know you will not treat it lightly. Someone may say, "oh well, nearly

every girl goes to college nowadays." This isn't true by a wide margin and of those that do go, a very small percentage enjoy the advantages of colleges of the standing of Sweet Briar. No! you are not the run of the mill. You have been especially selected. You are the élite, the élite of élite. Remember this as the days slip by, the golden days of Autumn, the frosty days of Winter and the warm Spring days. Bear in mind well the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Daughters of Time, the hypocritic Days,  
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,  
And marching single in an endless file,  
Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.  
To each they offer gifts after his will,  
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.  
I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,  
Forgot my morning wishes, hastily  
Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day  
Turned and departed silent. I, too late,  
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.

We have delved a bit into the past. Now let us glance at the future. Let us assume that you have derived a great benefit from your special opportunity and have completed your college career with credit. The question arises as to the purpose of this education: what are you being fitted for? The simplest answer is: to take your place in the world. This means something quite different from what it did in earlier years. I have read that Dr. Rollins, Sweet Briar's first chaplain, once noted, perhaps with a sigh of relief, that a whole class had married. Now I am sure that a happy marriage is just as much of a goal to you girls today as it was to your predecessors. I am equally certain that it is not the only one. Today it is a commonplace for a woman to have a career separate from that of marrying and raising a family. To fit themselves for this other career, many girls continue their education in professional and graduate schools. The num-

ber that do so is increasing year by year and I can imagine some future Dr. Rollins saying, "Thank heaven! all of the class of 1980 have been accepted in graduate schools."

This brings us to a consideration of the kind of world you are being trained to take a place in. What kind of a world have we mere men created for you? It isn't all bad but even a quick look tells us that we have little to boast about. Here in the United States, the greatest democracy the world has ever known, millions of our qualified citizens are prevented from exercising the electoral franchise. The percentage of people of voting age who go to the polls is so much lower than that in other countries that it constitutes a scandal. Again, we enjoy in the United States the highest standard of living in the world and yet — here is something that may shock you — there are from thirty to fifty millions of people in our nation who are living in families whose total income from all sources is less than \$2,500 a year or approximately half of what it costs to send a girl to a private college for nine months. Then, too, we have always prided ourselves on our great system of public education and yet the fact is that it is shockingly inadequate in many respects and, what is worse, millions of Americans are denied the privilege of what we do have.

What happens when responsible statesmen make an effort to correct these evils? The thunders of parochial politicians are loosed upon their heads. The sacred spectre of states rights is raised. We are told that greedy men in Washington are scheming to gain more and more power; if necessary, by the use of federal troops. Let us look at two examples of so-called Federal interference with education. When Dwight D. Eisenhower sent troops into Little Rock, Arkansas, he did so with the utmost reluctance and after re-

peated appeals to the state authorities. John F. Kennedy sent soldiers into Oxford, Mississippi, only after a patient exploration of every avenue of persuasion or negotiation. Rather than seeking an aggrandizement of power by the use of the armed forces, these two presidents, one Republican and one Democratic, first exhausted every other possible means of resolving the crises before they arrived at the identical decision that they must support the Supreme Court. It has been proclaimed that the Supreme Court is the villain; it has usurped the functions of the legislative branch, of the Congress. Everyone should realize that the Court can only pass judgment on the cases brought before it. When individuals or groups petition the courts, as a last resort, after crying in vain to Congress for enforcement of their inalienable rights as citizens, it would be an extraordinary thing if the Court refused a hearing. I believe that when unbiased and thinking people reflect on these matters they will decide that any State in the Union that takes care of its educational responsibilities and meets its obligations to its whole society need not fear oppression from either the executive or the judicial branch of the Federal Government.

We have been talking about the state of the nation. What about the state of the world? There seems little doubt that the world today faces a situation fraught with more danger than any other previously confronting mankind. There exist two enormously powerful systems, one capitalistic, democratic and religious, the other communistic, totalitarian and non-religious: each holds the means of destroying the other. Only the power of retaliation suffices to maintain an uneasy status quo. A dark and frightening picture. Yet even here one can see the faint gleams that presage "the coming of the light." The trickle of communication between men of good will on both sides of the iron curtain, while not a freshet, is a steadier flow. The great monolithic

structure of communism is betraying deep cleavages. The spirit of freedom in the satellite countries is finding more overt expression. It behooves us now to keep open every channel of communication, to seek every means of peaceful negotiation without in any way compromising our ideals of freedom and democracy.

Let us leave these dark and gloomy areas and return to President Kennedy's words. We turned them around to see if we could find out what Sweet Briar could do for you. The time will surely come when you will ask yourselves what you can do for Sweet Briar. This will be a turning point, when getting will change to giving, when opportunity will beget responsibility and responsibility will beget service. I have little fear but that one of your great loyalties will be to your *alma mater*. I have known many Sweet Briar girls and have always been impressed by their devotion to their college. Sweet Briar has known how to awaken their love and how to keep it. This gem of a college situated in the beautiful rolling countryside of Virginia will always beckon you as a haven of peace and inspiration and refreshment. You will learn, too, the satisfaction of continuing your identification with it and of enlisting in its service so that generations of girls to come can enjoy the same advantages you have had.

Other responsibilities, too, will command your attention—responsibilities towards your communities, your nation, the world itself. You will discover that "no man is an island" and that "the bell tolls for you." Here again, Sweet Briar graduates have set a high standard. In towns and cities you will find the alumnae active in promoting the general welfare, eager to improve their communities in health, in culture, in beauty and in wholesomeness. I feel certain that you will not only live up to these traditions but

surpass them. This is important, as you are so badly needed. It is a sobering thought that your generation and your sex must face the national and world situations that I have sketched out. You must share the responsibility for solving the complex problems that confront us. The time has passed when any citizen can hold himself aloof from his community. No longer can families and individuals retire to private *shangri-las* and ignore the stresses and strains around them. Whoever wishes for the kind of a world he wants to live in must do his share to make it so. You have seen the kind of world men have produced. We are waiting, aching for the woman's touch. We need your courage, your compassion, your brains and your wonderful intuition. We need you everywhere, in business, in education, in the arts and sciences, and, above all, in politics. So, we say to you—take your places at our sides, in full equality, and help us to make a "brave, new world."





